The Four T's – Session Two

Tefilah: The Art and Experience of Jewish Prayer

Rabbi Irwin Keller – Fall 2021

Table of Contents

This Impulse to Pray . . . p. 3

Jewish Worship . . . p. 5

Biblical Sources for Personal Prayer . . . p. 5

Temple Service: Offerings at the Altar . . . p. 6

The Rise of Communal Statutory Prayer . . . p. 6

Themes of Prayer and Worship . . . p. 6

Fixed Prayer Service – *Keva* . . . p. 7

The Prayer Service as a Journey through the Four Worlds . . . p. 7

The Friday Night Prayer Service: Traditional Flow . . . p. 9

Additional Elements . . . p. 11

Poetry and Music . . . p. 11

Movement . . . p. 12

Other Paths to Prayer . . . p. 13

Meditation . . . p. 13

Blessing Practice . . . p. 14

Blessing for Many Mindful Moments . . . p. 15

Contemplative Paths . . . p. 16

Psalm Practice . . . p. 16

The Issue of Kavanah . . . p. 17

Glossary . . . p. 18

Resources . . . p. 19

What is this impulse to pray?

[The call still sounding in the depths of the forest] filled him with a great unrest and strange desires. It caused him to feel a vague, sweet gladness, and he was aware of wild yearnings and stirrings for he knew not what. Sometimes he pursued the call into the forest, looking for it as though it were a tangible thing, barking softly or defiantly, as the mood might dictate. He would thrust his nose into the cool wood moss, or into the black soil where long grasses grew, and snort with joy at the fat earth smells; But he did not know why he did these various things. He was impelled to do them, and did not reason about them at all.

(Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*)

Prayer is either exceedingly urgent, exceedingly relevant, or inane and useless. Our first task is to learn to comprehend why prayer is an ontological necessity. God is hiding, and man is defying. Every moment God is creating and self-concealing. Prayer is disclosing or at least preventing irreversible concealing. God is ensconced in mystery, hidden in the depths. Prayer is pleading with God to come out of the depths. “Out of the depths have I called Thee, O Lord” (Psalms 130:1).

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, *On Prayer*)

In prayer we speak to a presence vaster than the unfathomable universe, yet closer to us than we are to ourselves: the God beyond who is also the Voice within.

(Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur*)

If you have ever tasted an apple plucked right off a New England tree, you will know the difference between a supermarket apple and a real apple. A supermarket apple has been washed, waxed, refrigerated. Vital parts of its chemistry have ebbed away. But an apple plucked from the mother tree? A *mechayeh.* Tastes like a living apple.

Prayer is the same. Many who live their lives as Jews, even many who pray every day, live on a wrapped and refrigerated version of prayer. We go to synagogue dutifully enough. We rise when we should rise, sit when we should sit. We read and sing along with the cantor and answer "Amen" in all the right places. We may even rattle through the prayers with ease. We sacrifice vitality for shelf-life, and the *neshomeh,* the Jewish soul, can tell the difference.

True prayer is a bursting forth of the soul to God. What can be more natural and more human than turning to God's listening presence with our thanks and our burdens? Prayer is one of the simplest and easiest of practices. It's always right there. The act of speaking directly to God, of opening our hearts to God's response, is one of the ultimate mystical experiences. Like great art and great music, prayer brings out the poetry of soul. Some of our most beautiful writings can be found in the pages of prayer.

Without true prayer, on the other hand, a very deep yearning that we have goes unanswered. We try to satisfy that hunger for God in other ways. We mistake the yearnings of soul for the cravings of body. We feed them with food and drink, drugs and sex, money and power, but these things just inflame our appetite further. We might seek higher things, intellectual pursuits, or artistic accomplishments. Even these do not touch us in that loneliest of places, the place that longs to be filled with God. That's why prayer, to me, is not a luxury but a necessity, a safeguard for our survival and our sanity.

(Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer*)

When someone is in a lot of pain, one of the most valuable things you can do is not fix them or offer help but simply bear witness: see the person in their totality—their strength undiminished by their suffering, their suffering in all its intensity and detail. [In Torah], Hagar, a woman thrown out into the wilderness with her child, has a transformative encounter with the unknown. In it, she gives the unknown a name, one of my very favorite: El Roee. It means: the power that sees or, perhaps, the Goddex of Bearing Witness. It's one way I understand prayer: when we lay out our sorrows before the Great Spirit we get that the Great Spirit is not a withholding parent, asking us to beg harder before fulfilling our wishes. Instead, we can know Great Spirit as a simple witnessing presence, a compassionate consciousness beholding us with love. Nothing else might change, but sometimes that can be enough to be transformative.

(Jericho Z. Vincent, Instagram Post, Oct. 12, 2021)

As was taught with regard to the verse:
"To love YHWH your God and to serve God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 11:13):
What is the service of God that is performed in the heart?
You must say that this is referring to *tefilah,* to prayer.

(Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 2a)

Biblical Sources for Personal Prayer

These sources are used to suggest an ongoing tradition of personal prayer, guided by time (evening, morning, afternoon) but without fixed structure or the need for a *minyan*.

Genesis 19:27 – "And Abraham arose early in the morning."

This is taken as a source for morning prayer.

Genesis 24:63 – "And Isaac went out to meditate/converse in the field toward evening. . ."

This is taken as a source of afternoon prayer.

Genesis 28:11 – "Jacob came upon a place and stopped there for the night for the sun had set."

This is taken as a source of evening prayer.

Psalm 55:18 – "Evening, morning, and noon I call out and moan and God hears my voice."

This is taken as a source for praying three times a day.

I Samuel 1:13 – "Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard."

This and surrounding verses are taken as precedent for personal, silent prayer.

Temple Service: Offerings at the Altar

In biblical times the primary vehicle for communion with the Divine was through offerings at the altar – first in the desert, and ultimately in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. These were done at fixed times in the morning and afternoon (but not at night). They were highly regimented. Textual sources for these offerings include much of the Book of Leviticus and some tractates of Talmud. Priests (*kohanīm*) acted as intermediaries.

There were several kinds of offerings, or *qorbanot* (coming from the Hebrew root q-r-b, meaning "to draw near"):

Burnt offering (*ʻolāh*) – multiple purposes, including release of vow, purification, conversion. In an *ʻolāh* offering, the animal offered is completely burned; nothing is left for consumption.

Sin offering (*ḥatāt*) – for atonement or purification for unintentional transgressions.

Peace or wholeness offering (*šlamīm* or *zevaḫ šlamīm*) – to mark or celebrate a favorable change in circumstance, the fulfillment of a vow, or spontaneous gratitude.

Meal/gift offering (*minḫāh*) – an additional or "gift" offering, with no animal involvement. Instead an offering of grain, frankincense and oil.

The Rise of Communal Statutory Prayer

After the destruction of the first Temple in 587 BCE, fixed prayer began to arise. By the time of the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, prayer came to officially replace the Temple offerings. Prayer order became fixed, and the details of wording, repetitions, postures, and more became the subject of Jewish law in the Talmud and in subsequent codes of law.

Themes of Prayer and Worship

Religious educators have articulated four major themes of prayer using simple words:

Wow (praise, worship, mystical transcendence)

Thanks (gratitude)

Sorry (penitential prayer)

Please (petitionary prayer)

FIXED PRAYER SERVICE – KEVA

Some have described the arc of the Jewish prayer service architecturally – moving inward in concentric courtyards of the Holy Temple, with the *Amidah* prayer taking place in the Holy of Holies. Then moving back outward, courtyard to courtyard.

The Chasidim describe this same arc as a movement through the Four Worlds. This is seen most clearly using the morning service as the model:

THE PRAYER SERVICE AS A JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOUR WORLDS

***Asiyah* – The World of Body, Physical Manifestation**

In the morning service, this opening section would include *Birkhot Hashachar* – the Morning Blessings, which praise God in ways that echo the acts of waking up in the morning: hearing the rooster, opening one's eyes, stretching, sitting up, washing, dressing. The blessings are explicitly matched up to these activities in BT Berakhot 60b. As communal liturgy, this section helps us arrive and settle.

***Yetzirah* – The World of Feeling, Emotion, Longing**

This portion of the service would include *Pesukei D'Zimrah,* or "Verses of Song." These are selected Psalms from the Book of Psalms. All the hallelujahs! The idea is to deepen, to praise, to sing, to warm up and raise the spirit. Get the heart beating. Building to Psalm 150 – *let every neshamah praise Yah!*

***Beriah* – The World of Thought and Contemplation**

This portion of the service gathers the community's attention and leads us through informative liturgy – God created the cosmos, God loves us, God is One, God redeemed us from slavery.

This section begins by gathering the pray-ers through the *Barkhu* prayer. It moves on to a consideration of the cosmos created by God (*Yotzer Or* in the morning and *Ma'ariv Aravim* in the evening), and a contemplation of God's love for the People Israel as evidenced by the giving of Torah (*Ahavah Rabbah* in the morning and *Ahavat Olam* in the evening. This leads to *Shema,* an articulation of Divine unity. Then *V'ahavta* – a Biblical passage requiring us to love God and speak of God's ways; obeying God's commandments as what will ensure proper rainfall and abundant harvest. Finally, this section comes around to a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt and the miracle of the Crossing of the Sea, which we celebrate with the prayer *Mi Khamokha,* drawn from the song of the Israelites after the crossing.

Atzilut – The World of Spirit, of Divine Intimacy

Arriving in this world, we are ready to engage with the Divine personally. The opportunity for this is the *Amidah* – the "standing" prayer. Also called the *Shmoneh Esrei* ("the 18") because on weekdays the *Amidah* comprises a series of 18 blessings. (Well, it did. Now there are 19 but the 18 name stuck.)

On Shabbat and Holy Days, the *Amidah* is constituted by only 7 blessings. We don't do outright petitionary prayer, but retain blessings of praise and awe and gratitude.

The *Amidah* is recited individually, even in a communal prayer setting. At the morning (*shacharit*) and afternoon (*minchah*) services, the prayer leader (*shaliach tzibur* or *ba'al t'filah*) repeats the entire *Amidah,* chanting it to make sure that the congregation, by saying *amen*, has fulfilled its obligation of reciting these blessings. The evening (*aravit* or *ma'ariv*) service does not include a repetition, since the evening service is not obligatory (the Temple offerings only took place morning and afternoon). Therefore if an individual doesn't get all the words right, it doesn't matter, because the offering of the words is not to fulfill a legal obligation.

The *Amidah* begins with a prayer that we might be able to pray (*Adonai sefatai tiftach...*). It concludes with a prayer that our prayers may be accepted (*Yih'hu l'ratzon imrei fi...*).

It is also obligatory to offer a personal prayer at the end of the *Amidah.* This is the place where we are most vulnerable and open, in the intimate presence of the Divine. We open our hearts.

Beriah – The World of Thought and Contemplation

On Monday, Thursday, and Shabbat mornings (and Shabbat afternoon) we move back into *Beriah* with the reading of the weekly Torah portion. There isn't a clear return through *Beriah* in services without a Torah reading.

Yetzirah – The World of Feeling, Emotion, Longing

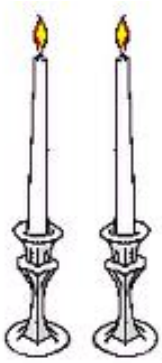
Descending through the world of *Yetzirah* we do the *Aleynu* prayer – a reprise of praise and a hope for a healed future. There has generally been some form of *Kaddish* separating all these sections. We now arrive at the final *Kaddish* of the service – the Mourners' Kaddish.

Asiyah – The World of Body, Physical Manifestation

Although there is no more liturgy after the Mourners' Kaddish, other than a closing anthem, it is customary to eat or drink something together, which returns us back into our bodies.

THE FRIDAY NIGHT PRAYER SERVICE:

TRADITIONAL FLOW



Kabbalat Shabbat

Yedid Nefesh – mystical medieval poem by Elazar Azikri

Psalms 95 through 99

Psalm 29

Lecha Dodi – a mystical medieval poem by Shlomo Alkabetz

Psalm 92 (the Shabbat psalm) and 93

In some communities:

Mourners' Kaddish

Study of a passage of Mishna

Kaddish D'Rabbanan (the Kaddish recited in honor of learning)

Shema and Her Blessings

Barkhu – the official call to worship. Leader calls out, congregation responds.

Ma'ariv Aravim – God created light and dark, sun, moon and stars

Ahavat Olam – God loves us with an unending love, giving us Torah and Mitzvot

Shema – a verse from Deuteronomy proclaiming God's oneness

V'ahavta – more from Deuteronomy, obliging us to love God and speak of – and follow – Mitzvot

Emet v'Emunah – a statement of faith in God, leading into...

Mi Khamokha – remembering the Crossing of the Sea and praising God as Redeemer

Hashkivenu – evening prayer, that we lie down in peace and rise up to life; actual and metaphorical

Transition

V'shamru – a passage from Exodus that contains the commandment to keep Shabbat

Chatzi Kaddish – short form transitional Kaddish prayer

Amidah

Adonai Sefatai – an introductory sentence said while stepping forward 3 steps with eagerness

Avot v'Imahot – Blessing #1: a reminder that we are the legacy of Abraham and Sarah

Gevurot – Blessing #2: God has the power of life and death; this includes a seasonal prayer for rain

Kedushah – Blessing #3: proclaiming God's holiness (the morning version reenacts the angels, as we bounce on our toes and say: *kadosh kadosh kadosh!* holy holy holy!)

Kedushat Hayom – Blessing #4: God sanctified the seventh day; may our rest on this day be a suitable offering. This prayer includes the opening of Genesis Chapter 2, *vayekhulu hashamayim,* that the creation was complete and God rested on the 7th day.

Avodah – Blessing #5: a prayer that our prayers be accepted and that in the future we might once again make offerings in the Holy Temple.

Hoda'ah – Blesing #6: a prayer of abundant gratitude

Shalom Rav – Blessing #7: a prayer for peace

Silent Prayer – not necessarily silent, but personal and individual and improvised

Yih'yu L'Ratzon and *Elohai N'tzor* – prayers that the words of our mouths be for good

Me'eyn Sheva – no formal repetition of the *Amidah* by the prayer leader is required in a Shabbat evening service. Nonetheless the prayer leader chants this paragraph, which recaps the themes of the 7 blessings of the *Amidah.*

Transition

Kaddish Shalem – an extra long-form transitional Kaddish prayer, signifying completion of the *tefilah*

Kiddush – often when *kiddush* over wine is done in synagogue, it happens here

Closing Elements

Aleynu – a prayer expressing that it is our duty to praise God, and going on to imagine a future world in which evil is no more.

Kaddish Yatom – this is the Mourners' Kaddish

Closing Hymn – in the Diaspora, communities traditionally sing *Yigdal,* a poetic restatement of Maimonides' 13 Articles of Faith. In Israel, communities traditionally sing *Adon Olam* which, in the Diaspora, concludes the Shabbat *morning* service.

Poetry and Music

Since the establishment of a fixed worship service in antiquity, prayer leaders have bristled at being boxed in. Virtuosic poets wrote *piyyutim* – prayer-poems to be inserted into the service and sung. These *piyyutim* engage word-play, rhyme, biblical passages, and other features, such as acrostics, to enliven the community's imagination. The *paytan,* or liturgical poet, who is held as the gold standard was Elazar ben Kalir (570-640). Debate continue among Jewish legal sources as to whether fixed prayer could be interrupted by poetry, and limits were placed. Many *piyyutim* open with a *r'shut* – several lines of poetry requesting the community's permission to interrupt.

These *piyyutim* were undoubtedly sung or chanted, although we do not know the original melodies of any of them.

Some of the most famous *piyyutim* include *Yedid Nefesh, Lekha Dodi, Adon Olam, Yigdal, Eyn Kelo-heynu, Ma'oz Tzur, Adon Haslichot.*

The prayer service is traditionally sung. Almost nothing in the service is without a melody. A key exception is the Mourners' Kaddish, so that mourners do not have to perform.

The set of melodies used for prayer is called the *nusach* (plural: *nuscha'ot*). Communities around the world have their own traditional *nusach.* There are various melodic traditions of the Sefardi world, i.e. Jews descending from Spain. *Eydot Hamizrach,* i.e. Jewish communities from Arab lands have a range of *nuscha'ot* – Baghdadi, Yerushalmi, Halabi, Yemenite. Rome has its own melodies, as do the Romaniyot Jews of Greece. There are numerous *nuscha'ot* in the Ashkenazi world – the melodies from Germany differ from those of Eastern Europe.

New melodies for prayers and *piyyutim* continue to develop around the Jewish world.

Movement

Jewish liturgy has never been merely a string of words recited. Instead, many elements of embodiment are involved, helping us remember prayer and ground it in our bodies through holy choreography.

Some examples:

Tallit and Tefillin. We "suit up" for prayer some of the time, wearing *tefillin* on weekday mornings, and *tallit* on any morning service. The *tefillin* is specifically to ground the words of the *Shema* in our bodies, wearing them between our eyes and on our hands. The *tallit* does not have a clear specific symbolism, but is an involvement of the body in prayer.

Bowing, bending, prostrating. The *Aleynu* prayer has language of prostration: *va'anachnu kor'im umishtachavim,* "we bend and prostrate ourselves." Presumably in the past a full-body prostration was done, now reduced to a bend at the knee and a bow. However on Yom Kippur afternoon, many Jewish communities prostrate to the ground. There is also a bow in the weekday *Amidah* blessing that begins *Modim anachnu lakh.* In both cases, it is custom to stand back up by the time we reach the word Adonai. There is also a custom for those reciting the Mourners' Kaddish to bow in three directions (right, left, forward) during the closing *Oseh Shalom* paragraph.

Chest-tapping. In prayers for forgiveness – including the *vidui* on Yom Kippur and the weekday *Amidah* blessing that begins *S'lach lanu avinu* there is a custom of tapping or striking our own chests when we speak of having sinned.

Covering the eyes. During the *shema* there is a custom of covering one's eyes to focus exclusively on the words and their meaning.

Tiptoes. During the *Kedushah* blessing of the *Amidah* we imitate the angels at the Divine Throne as described in the Book of Isaiah, by rising up on our tiptoes while saying *kadosh kadosh kadosh.*

Stepping forward and back. In some communities it is customary to take three steps forward at the beginning of the *Amidah,* going right into a bend-and-bow that happens with the opening word *Barukh,* in the *Avot v'Imahot* blessing. For those who follow this tradition, it is customary to take three steps back at the conclusion of the Mourners' Kaddish.

Blessing Practice

Blessing practice in Judaism inserts moments of mindfulness into time. Nothing is eaten or drunk without blessing. No *mitzvah* is fulfilled without blessing. No remarkable moment or beautiful sight or smell is experienced without blessing.

There are two typical blessing forms:

- For experiencing nature, food, special moments, bodily functions, it is a short form:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן׃

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheynu Melech Ha'olam borey p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Maker of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

- For fulfilling a *mitzvah,* i.e. an act that is commanded in Torah (usually), it is a long form:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת׃

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheynu Melech Ha'olam

asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

Blessed are You, Eternal One, Who has made us holy through *mitzvot*

and has commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.

On the following page is a chart of some useful blessings!

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם . . .

Baruch Atah Adonai (YHWH) Eloheynu Melech Ha'olam[1]*...*

...hamótzi léchem min ha'áretz.
...who draws bread from the earth.
(Said over bread; blesses the whole meal.)

...shehakól nih'yéh bid'varó.
...by whose word everything exists.
(All-purpose food blessing: eggs, meat, liquor.)

...borei minei m'zonót.
...who creates all types of nourishment.
(For non-bread baked goods.)

...borei p'ri hagáfen.
...who creates the fruit of the vine.
(For grape wine.)

...borei p'ri ha'étz.
...who creates the fruit of the tree.
(For fruit that grows on trees.)

...borei p'ri ha'adamáh.
...who creates the fruit of the ground.
(Fruit or vegetables that grow out of the earth.)

...borei minei v'samím.
...who creates all kinds of fragrant spices.
(For perfume or fragrant spices.)

...borei is'vei v'samím.
...who creates fragrant growing things.
(For fragrant herbs, grasses or flowers.)

...shekákhah lo b'olamó.
...who has such as this in the universe!
(Upon noticing beauty in the natural world.)

...oséh ma'asei v'reishít.
...who enacts Creation.
(Upon observing a natural wonder –
comets and mountains and mighty rivers.)

...hatóv v'hametív.
...who is good and does good.
(Upon hearing good news.)

...dayán ha'emét.
...the Judge of Truth.
(Upon hearing of a death.)

Source: Rabbi Marcia Prager, *The Path of Blessing*

1. For Adonai, which has a connotation of "Lord", one could use Havayah, a permutation of God's name, YHWH, that comes out to mean "Being". One could also choose to omit *Melekh,* "King", with *Ruach,* "Spirit".

Contemplative Paths

Judaism has lesser known but ancient meditative practices. Even the Book of Psalms seems to point at practices of silent meditation in deep antiquity:

> Psalm 65:2 – *lekha dumiyāh tehīlāh*. "To you, silence is praise."
>
> Psalm 46:11 – *harpū ud'u ki anōkhi Elohīm.* "Be still, and know that I am God."

Jewish mystical communities engaged various kinds of meditative practices. Some involve contemplating a word, or even staring at YHWH, God's four-letter Hebrew name, in a practice called *Shiviti,* based on the phrase from Psalm 16:8, *shiviti YHWH l'negdi tamid* – "I place YHWH before me always." Other methods involve imagining movement through the Ten Sefirot or ascending and descending through the Four Worlds, usually accompanied by a holy text that one is reciting aloud or internally.

Asceticism has generally not been valued in Judaism, although there have been communities with ascetic practices.

Ecstatic practices are common in mystical communities, particularly the Chasidim. In these communities song and dance are used to open up portals to transcendent experience. The Bratzlav Chasidim are particularly noteworthy in this regard, following the specific instructions of Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav to find God through joyous song and dance. Chasidim also introduced the use of the *nigun,* or wordless melody, as a way of carrying prayerful *kavanah.*

Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav also encouraged his followers to engage in *hitbodedut,* a kind of solo, wild prayer experience. His instruction was for them to go out alone into nature and to talk to God, not in Hebrew but in their mother tongue (Yiddish in this case). To pour out one's heart in lament and joy and petition.

Psalm Practice

The Book of Psalms contains our oldest communal prayers. Beautiful, memorable language of petition and praise and gratitude. The voice of the psalmist is often that of a heartbroken person, or afraid, or desperate. These are not prayers written by some scholarly rabbi deciding what congregants should say. They are intimate words, originating in a desperately pious poet's heart (tradition says they were written by King David).

Psalms, in whole or excerpted, are sprinkled through the fixed prayer service. But the custom of simply reading psalms – perhaps dedicated to the healing of someone who is ill – is a beautiful one. Many psalms will be familiar. For instance, Psalm 23 (*Adonai ro'i lo ech'sar* – "Adonai is my shepherd, I want for nothing") and Psalm 121 (*Esa eynai* – "I lift up my eyes to the mountains; whence cometh my help?") and Psalm 133 (*hineh mah tov* – "how good it is to sit as family together") and Psalm 118 (*min hametzar karati Yah* – "from the narrow place I call out to Yah").

To read Psalms in Hebrew or in translation, one can go to sefaria.org and type "Psalms" into the search field. But a pocket-sized volume of Psalms can be a remarkable thing to carry with you and develop a relationship with. I recommend the *Metsudah Tehillim* pocket size, "linear" style, lining up the Hebrew side by side with the English translation.

It is easy when reciting fixed prayer to lose track of one's thoughts. The rabbis of antiquity discuss how one's intention and attention should be placed during prayer. The Chassidic masters see that the *kavanah,* or specific spiritual or imaginal focus, can be the vehicle of prayer as much as the fixed words. Here are a few teachings from the Ba'al Shem Tov on this subject, taken from Menachem Kallus, *Pillar of Prayer.*

By Observing Their Own Travails *Tzaddiqim* Discern How to Pray for the *Shekhinah*

> I heard from my teacher, of blessed memory [i.e. the Ba'al Shem Tov], that the *Tzaddiqim* are the messengers of the *Shekhinah* [Zohar 3:278a, Ra'ayah Mehemana], and it is by observing the nature of their own tribulations that they discern the privations suffered by the *Shekhinah* and pray on Her behalf. Through this they cause the union between the blessed Holy One and His Presence the *Shekhinah.* This is the purpose of prayer, and with this understanding we may answer the well-known question: "Why is there a need for prayer, given that the Holy One discerns the needs of the person, for He examines the inner thoughts of the person?" It is because prayer is for the sake of the true needs of the One on high, and by discerning one's own needs one can recognize the needs of the One on high in His immanent Presence and pray for them. Thereby one's own needs are also fulfilled. However, one ought to intend one's prayer for the sake of the *Shekhinah* and not for one's own sake.

Praying with the Cosmos

> Intend, in your prayer, that you are arousing the letters whereby the heavens and the earth, and all creatures, both the higher and the lower, and all realms were created. This being so when you recite your prayers and praises [to Divinity], you are saying them together with all the worlds and all creatures, because you are arousing the source of the inner life of all creatures, and are praying with [the inner energy of] all of them and raising all of them up – those of heaven and those of the earth – through this intention. By this means, the spiritul elite who pray with *Kavanah* also arouse the inner "letters" of those of lesser stature so that they too can pray with more *Kavanah* and enthusiasm, and can better themselves. The Ba'al Shem Tov revealed this to his disciples and said: "You must pray even for the sake of the flying chirping bird…"

How to Pray in Solitude and Be Accounted as if One Prayed with the Congregation

> I heard from my teacher [the Ba'al Shem Tov] the meaning of [BT Avot 1:6 & 1:16]: "Make for yourself a 'Rav.'" This means connect yourself with "the multitude…" That is to say, when you are compelled to pray in solitude, realize that there are many wayfarers who pray alone, or land-leasers living in isolated areas. Unite with them. This is also the meaning of [BT Avot 1:6] "acquire for yourself a companion"; thereby, one will be able to "account each person as meritorious." Thus, the multitude of individuals is favorably judged. So too, when you are repenting, connect yourself in a like manner. The wise will hear and add further conclusions.

GLOSSARY

Amidah (עֲמִידָה) – the standing prayer at the heart of the service; also called the *Shmoneh Esrei,* "the 18," on weekdays.

Ba'al tefilah (בַּעַל) – prayer leader.

Chatimah (חֲתִימָה) – the blessing formula (*barukh Atah Adonai...*) that closes a longer prayer.

Daven – a Yiddish word meaning "to pray" in an energized Chasidic style.

Hitbodedut (הִתְבּוֹדְדוּת) – a practice of solo spoken prayer, in nature and in one's native tongue

Kavanah (כַּוָּנָה) – intention; the spirit with which prayer is offered; as opposed to *keva.*

Keva (קֶבַע) – statutory or fixed prayer, in the right order with the right wording.

Ma'ariv (מַעֲרִיב) or *Arvit* (עַרְבִית) – evening prayer service.

Minchah (מִנְחָה) – afternoon prayer service, or the afternoon Temple offering.

Minyan (מִנְיָן) – a quorum of 10 needed for communal prayer.

Nigun (נִגּוּן) – a wordless melody intended to carry prayerful *kavanah.*

Nusach (נֻסַח) – a community's melodic system for chanting prayer.

Piyut (פִּיּוּט) – a medieval prayer-poem, written by a *paytan.*

Shacharit (שַׁחֲרִית) – morning prayer service.

Shaliach tzibur (שַׁלִּיחַ צִבּוּר) – prayer leader or cantor; literally "emissary of the collective."

Siddur (סִדּוּר) – prayer book. Literally something put in order.

Tefilah (תְּפִלָּה) – prayer, or specifically the *amidah* prayer.

Tehilim (תְּהִלִּים) – psalms.

Siddurim

Kol Haneshamah (Reconstructionist Press 1996) – the printed *siddur* we use at Ner Shalom

Koren Siddur (Lobel Edition, 2015, with commentary by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks)

Siddur Masorti, Sn Egalitarian Sefaradi Siddur (Open Siddur Project 2020; siddurmasorti.com)

The Metzudah Tehilim (2000)

Reference Books

Living Judaism: The Complete Guide to Jewish Belief, Tradition, and Practice, Rabbi Wayne Dosick (1995)

Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know about the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (1991)

Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (2014)

Pillar of Prayer: Guidance in Contemplative Prayer, Sacred Study, and the Spiritual Life, from the Baal Shem Tov and His Circle, Menachem Kallus (2011)

Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History, Ismar Elbogen (1993)

Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Research, Ruth Langer (2015)

Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service, Reuven Hammer (1995)

The Path of Blessing: Experiencing the Energy and Abundance of the Divine, Rabbi Marcia Prager (2003)

Online Resources

10 Weeks, 10 Prayers: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-hub/10-weeks-10-prayers-the-shema/

Standard Siddurim – Ashkenaz, Sefard, and Edot Hamizrach: https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Liturgy

Reconstructionist Kol Haneshamah Siddur: https://ramatshalom.org/our-siddur/

Rabbi Marcia Prager's Jewish Renewal Shabbat Morning Siddur:
https://pnaior-phila.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Prager-Shabbat-Morning-Siddur.pdf